

Engine 15 Firehouse
(Demolished)
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY

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ENGINE 15 FIREHOUSE

San Francisco City and County, California

ADDRESS 2150 California Street
OWNER City of San Francisco
OCCUPANT No longer occupied
USE Firehouse - Demolished. 1959

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Engine 15 Firehouse was built in 1884 and was representative of the Gothic Revival Spirit that prevailed in San Francisco from the 1850's and reached its peak in the 1880's. This was one of the principal buildings of this picturesque style which survived the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. It was demolished in 1959 and the important ornamental features of the facade were retained for exhibition purposes.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History The Board of Fire Commissioners of the City of San Francisco recommended the organization of a steam fire engine to be located on California Street, between Laguna and Buchanan Streets on July 30, 1884. The resolution was adopted and forwarded to the Board of Supervisors of the City. It was recorded that on February 9, 1885, City Commissioner Mason reported that the grading of the lot for Engine Company 15 was progressing, and on April 13, 1885, he reported the satisfactory progress on the erection of the firehouse. On June 8, 1885 Commissioner Mason reported that the completion date would be on or about July 1, 1885. June 26, 1885, Engine Company 15 was organized as authorized to go into service July 1, 1885.

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A certification by the architect P. J. O'Connor was submitted on July 13, 1885, stating the completion. The Board of Supervisors assembled at the firehouse on July 18, 1885 for the inspection, and on August 10, 1885, Engine Company 15 Firehouse was accepted by the City of San Francisco. On August 2, 1918, the conversion from horse drawn to automotive was instigated. This building was demolished in August 1959 to be replaced by a more "up to date" engine station.

Historical Events Although this building has no significant record in events pertaining to California history other than its assistance in the 1906 disaster, it stood as a landmark of the "Gothic Burlesque" of the late nineteenth century. Built during a period when fire fighting units competed among themselves to operate the most elaborate firehouse, it was a foremost attraction in San Francisco until its demolition in 1959.

Supplemental Material

Maass, John The Gingerbread Age, A View of Victorian America, New York, Rinehart and Company, Inc. 1957

Perusse, Lyle F., The Gothic Revival in California, Journal of The Society of Architectural Historians, Oct. 1955. Vol. XIV, No. 3, pp. 15-23.

Authorities Consulted

Chief William Gilmore, San Francisco Fire Department, City Hall, San Francisco, California

Prepared by

Richard C. Peters

RICHARD C. PETERS
Architect

December 1959

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General - Engine Company 15 Firehouse was a characteristic type of firehouse built in San Francisco during the late nineteenth century. Two storied with a hose tower, it was designed to house the engine and horses on the first floor, the firemen on the second floor, and the hose tower near the entrance for ease in handling the hoses.

Exterior - The building was thirty feet in width and one hundred thirty seven and one half feet in depth. The foundations were concrete and rubble. The walls were standard red brick filled cavity walls, plastered and painted. The facade was symmetrical on the first and second story accented with an asymmetrical wood frame hose tower. The lower section of this tripartite facade consisted of a central portal surmounted by a transom window in the form of a quasi-Tudor arch. The engine company was identified by the numerals "15" embossed at the crown of the arch. Flanking the central portal were two painted segmental arched side entrances. Above each entrance was a circular quatrefoil window. The upper story was separated from the lower by a horizontal ornamented band course moulding. This was terminated at the sides by consoles with gabled finials and ornamental symbolic owls embossed.

The upper story consisted of a central opening composed of two double hung windows replete with tracery in a quasi-Tudor arch. This was flanked by single double hung windows in quasi-Tudor arches and two incised ornamental quatrefoils with paterae. The gabled crenellated parapet had a central finial and two flanking finials all in the form of fire hydrants, the center one capped with a fireman's hat. Two San Francisco fire chiefs were the symbolic grotesques embossed below the corbelled finials and crenellated parapet. The shingled wooden tower hose tower was capped with a weather vane and soaring gold phoenix bird.

Interior - The plan of the building was comprised of two main floors, a basement housing the old turntable machinery, and the hose tower. The first floor, composed of a large engine room, waiting room and kitchen, was connected to the second floor by a cast-iron circular staircase and two brass fire pole exits. The second floor contained the dormitories and the upper entrance to the hose tower. The tower was accessible by a three story wood ladder and contained the drying space for hanging the hoses.

The principal rooms of the first and second floors were floored with random width wood planking, 1" x 3" pine flooring and linoleum tile.

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The interior walls were wood wainscoted and painted plaster on lath. The ceilings of the principal rooms were painted plaster on lath. The kitchen, waiting room and main dormitory were illuminated by sky lights. The interior of the hose tower was exposed wood stud wall construction.

Site - The building was oriented with the main axis northeast and southwest giving the front elevation southwestern exposure.

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